ARE UNIVERSAL WELFARE POLICIES REALLY MORE POPULAR THAN SELECTIVE ONES?

A critical discussion of empirical research

Tijs Laenen & Dimitri Gugushvili

Centrum voor Sociologisch Onderzoek
Centre for Sociological Research

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Corresponding author

Name: Tijs Laenen

Affiliation: Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven

Postal address: Parkstraat 45 bus 3601, 3000 Leuven

Tel: +32 16 37 44 23

E-mail: tijs.laenen@kuleuven.be

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Parkstraat 45 – bus 3601
B – 3000 Leuven

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Abstract

In social policy literature, it is often assumed that universal policies are more popular than selective ones among the general public, because they supposedly generate broader self-interested coalitions and are considered morally superior. This working paper revisits this assumption by critically reviewing the existing empirical literature on public support for differently organized welfare schemes. Our main conclusion is that the popularity of universal vis-à-vis selective welfare provision remains very much an open question, to be investigated further. First, the studies that are typically cited to support the claim that universalism is indeed more popular are inconclusive because they conflate the institutional design of welfare programmes with their respective target groups. Second, there is considerable variation in public support for universal and selective welfare provision across countries, time, and policy domains. This suggests that future research should rather focus on scrutinizing *under which circumstances* -when, where and why- one social policy design option is more popular than the other.

Keywords: welfare provision, public opinion, institutional design, universalism, selectivism, deservingness

Content

1	Introduction	6
2	The concepts of universalism and selectivism in social policy	8
3	Theoretical arguments	10
3.1	<i>Why universalism is more popular than selectivism.....</i>	<i>10</i>
3.2	<i>Why selectivism is perhaps equally (or more) popular than universalism....</i>	<i>11</i>
4	A critical discussion of the empirical evidence.....	13
4.1	<i>The program comparison approach</i>	<i>13</i>
4.2	<i>The policy principles approach</i>	<i>14</i>
5	Conclusion and discussion	17
6	References.....	20
7	Appendices.....	24
7.1	<i>Appendix I. Overview of the public opinion studies discussed.....</i>	<i>24</i>

1 Introduction

As advanced welfare states face mounting pressures triggered by major demographic, economic and social changes occurring in the past decades, important questions are being raised about the fairness and the sustainability of existing social protection mechanisms (van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017). One of these questions concerns the traditional dilemma about the scope of social policies: should different types of welfare provision be universal, granted on the basis of citizenship/residency, or selectively aimed only at those who are in proven need? Both approaches have well-known merits and limitations, which make the choice particularly difficult for policymakers (see for example van Oorschot, 2002 for an overview). Selective benefits allow for a higher degree of vertical redistribution at a considerably lower cost, but are criticized for generating moral hazard and poverty traps, for stigmatizing the beneficiaries, and for being administratively complex and costly. As it is impossible to target poor families with a 100 per cent accuracy, selective programmes are also bound to result in the double error of excluding eligible and including non-eligible beneficiaries. Universal provision avoids many of these problems, but entails much higher costs, which over time may become fiscally unsustainable, or may crowd out spending on other essential public programmes (Greenstein, 1991; Pierson, 1994). Critics of the universal approach argue that it is simply too expensive –particularly in times when economic recessions, ageing populations and migration flows are putting pressure on fiscal budgets–, and too wasteful – because also the better-off echelons of society would benefit (Goodin & Le Grand, 1987).

It has, however, been argued that universal provision has one major advantage that is critical for its fiscal sustainability: strong public support, which politicians in welfare democracies cannot ignore without risking a major electoral backlash (Brooks & Manza, 2007). Indeed, as we will demonstrate below, a large number of studies have shown that universally targeted programmes such as old-age pensions and health care schemes are more popular than selectively targeted programmes such as means-tested social assistance and housing allowances (Svallfors, 2012). The social policy literature offers two main explanations for this. The first is that universal programmes appeal to the self-interest of a much larger group of citizens who benefit from them or expect to do so in future (Korpi & Palme, 1998; Skocpol, 1991). The second reason concerns considerations of moral legitimacy: universal programmes are argued to excel in terms of substantive and procedural justice, and in terms of fair distribution of financial burdens (Rothstein, 1998). Together with the seemingly solid empirical evidence, these theoretical arguments have given the idea that universal welfare policies are more popular (and thus politically less vulnerable) than selective ones a prominent status in social policy literature.

At the same time, however, theoretical arguments exist for assuming that selective welfare policies are at least equally (if not more) popular than universal ones – which for some reason have attracted limited attention in the social policy discipline. From a self-interest perspective, it could be argued that a universal system is not necessarily the most optimal rational choice, at least for middle-income and high-income earners, who often pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits under such systems, especially in the case of progressive taxation (Rothstein, 2001). From a moral point of view, it is plausible that selective welfare policies are considered superior to universal ones, mainly because many may feel that targeting the poor is actually more fair than universally distributing public

resources to all citizens/residents, including those who might not really need them (Goodin & Le Grand, 1987). Therefore, this paper revisits the idea that universalism is the more-popular policy design option by critically discussing the existing empirical literature on public support for differently organized welfare benefits and services.

Our main finding is that the empirical evidence in favour of the universal welfare approach is less solid as it initially seems. First, the studies that are typically cited to support the claim that universalism is indeed more popular may be criticized for conflating the institutional design of welfare programmes with their respective target groups: the programmes they compare differ not only in terms of their design, but also in terms of the groups they target. This is important in light of the growing evidence showing that public support for welfare schemes crucially depends on the perceived deservingness of their target groups (Laenen, 2020; van Oorschot et al., 2017). Accordingly, it remains unclear for example whether old-age pensions are more popular than social assistance schemes because they are more universal in design, because they are targeted at a more-deserving group, or because of a combination of both factors. Second, our discussion shows that public support for universal vis-à-vis selective welfare provision varies across countries, time, and policy domains. This excludes the possibility that one policy design option is more popular than the other, always and everywhere. Instead, we argue that the task for future research is to scrutinize *under which circumstances* -when, where and why- one policy design option is more popular than the other.

The paper's main contribution is that it opens up a new research agenda that is highly relevant for on-going academic as well as political debates on the institutional design of the future welfare state. Theoretically, we critically re-assess the recurring assumption that self-interest and moral considerations make citizens prefer universal over selective welfare provision. We also recognize that popular support for different welfare programs is not only driven by their institutional design but also by the perceived deservingness of their primary target group. In doing so, we expose the need and pave the way for more-comprehensive examinations of the theoretical mechanisms underlying popular support for differently designed welfare provisions. Empirically, we bring order to a relatively scattered body of literature by showing that most existing studies in the field can be classified into one of two broad approaches: the *program comparison* approach (which compares support for real-world or fictive welfare programmes with different institutional designs) and the *policy principles* approach (which asks people what kind of entitlement criteria should be used to organize different social benefits and services). As we show in our critical discussion, however, both approaches point towards the same over-all conclusion: the social legitimacy of universal vis-à-vis selective welfare provision remains very much an open question that needs to be investigated further in future empirical research. In practical public policy terms, a deeper empirical and theoretical understanding of public support for policies with different institutional designs is extremely valuable for policymakers because it can assist them to devise measures that the electorate is more likely to endorse.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly explain our understanding of the concepts of universalism and selectivism in social policy. Second, we describe the main theoretical arguments for why universalism is claimed to be more popular than selectivism, but also for why selectivism might be equally (or more) popular. Third, we critically discuss existing empirical studies, which are classified into two broad categories: the program comparison approach and the policy principles approach. Finally, we consider the theoretical implications of our discussion and suggest a number of promising avenues for future research.

2 The concepts of universalism and selectivism in social policy

As any widely used term, the concepts of universalism and selectivism may have somewhat different meanings in various (welfare state) contexts. Nevertheless, in social policy literature, universalism is usually associated with wide coverage and generous welfare programmes, while selectivism (often also referred to as ‘targeting’) is used to denote programmes that provide means-tested, low-level, residual benefits to the most disadvantaged groups. However, a careful unpacking of these terms shows that these general definitions are not entirely accurate and semantic differences can have substantial implications for the interpretation of both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence.

By definition, ‘universal’ implies something that is available to everyone as a right based on citizenship or residency. In terms of distributive justice principles, this corresponds to the principle of equality (Clasen & van Oorschot, 2002). The problem, however, is that in practice there is no universal cash transfer and strictly speaking, even the much proposed universal basic income would not qualify as such, because it would most likely exclude children and newly arrived migrants. The social service that comes closest to universalism is the Beveridgean health care system, though in practice it is only used by a minority of those entitled at any one point in time. Thus, what are termed as universal policies, are never universal in a strict meaning of the word. Practically all transfers and services are targeted in the sense that they are directed towards meeting particular needs of a delineated group of people (van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017). Within targeted benefits, the key differences in entitlement lie in the distributive justice principles and the method for selection of the target group. Benefits can be based on the principle of equity, in which case the beneficiaries are identified through contribution records, usually in terms of paying taxes or social security contributions. Examples of such transfers are contributory old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. Alternatively, benefits can be based on the need principle, or in other words, be selective in terms of focusing on the poor. In this case, there are two ways of selecting beneficiaries. One is categorical: all members of particular groups can be entitled to a transfer or service. This is frequently used to reach groups with clear identifiable needs, such as disabled people or children. An alternative method is to use various methods to verify the financial needs of people who form a heterogeneous group consisting of different age, labour market status, physical status and other categories. This is what is called ‘means testing’. Means testing procedures may involve tests of income against pre-defined thresholds (‘income-testing’), assets (‘asset-testing’), or productive capacities and general living conditions (‘proxy means testing’). People confirmed to be poor are usually entitled to various benefits, such as social assistance, housing benefits, exemption from user fees and so on. Instead of reaching only the poor, means testing can also be used to exclude affluent citizens from certain benefits or charging them co-payments for using social services (so called ‘affluence-testing’) (Gugushvili & Hirsch, 2014; Kangas, 1995). Moreover, means testing can be combined with universal entitlement in order to provide higher levels of support to those experiencing higher needs. This is usually referred to as ‘targeting within universalism’ (Skocpol, 1991).

As noted above, there is a general trend of universal benefits being more generous than means-tested ones (see for example Jesuit & Mahler, 2004). This has prompted proposals for including generosity as one of the defining criteria for universalism. For example, Goul Andersen (2011, p. 11) has argued that “a minimalist replacement rate providing only

poverty protection or less cannot be considered universalist except in a very narrow formal sense. If private supplements are necessary to maintain a decent standard of living, we would hardly speak of universalist arrangements". In our view, this proposition is problematic. While the level of generosity is an important feature of social transfers and significantly influences their distributional outcomes, mixing it with the entitlement criteria risks blurring the focus on the underlying distributional objectives. There are many universal programmes that provide low-level benefits (e.g. child benefits in many European countries) or vice versa, means-tested programmes that provide fairly generous transfers (e.g. old-age pensions in Australia). For reasons of analytical clarity, it is preferable to stick to the narrow definition of universalism and selectivism based on distributional objectives and targeting criteria (for a similar approach see Gelepithis (2018), also Kildal and Kuhnle (2004)). In this article, universalism therefore refers to welfare policies that are more broadly targeted on the basis of citizenship or residency, while selectivism is understood as means-tested policies that are more narrowly targeted at poor people on the basis of their financial needs.

3 Theoretical arguments

3.1 Why universalism is more popular than selectivism

From the early days of the social policy discipline, scholars concerned with the persistent poverty amidst the general affluence, especially in the USA, sought to discern whether it was the very design of selective policies targeted at poor families that contributed to the political failure of these programmes (Greenstein, 1991; Skocpol, 1991; Titmuss, 1968). Whether focusing on the welfare state as a whole or on specific social policies, analysts have assumed that public support is an intermediary variable between the institutional design and the generosity and sustainability of welfare provision. This causal mechanism is implicit in some of the earliest classic texts of social policy, for example in Titmuss' (1968) *Commitment to Welfare*, where he asserted that "separate discriminatory services for poor people have always tended to be poor quality services" (p. 45), a statement later echoed by many others, including Sen (1995), who also argued that "benefits meant exclusively for the poor often end up being poor benefits" (p. 14). However, the research that explicitly tries to establish the causal link appeared somewhat later. Among these studies, particularly remarkable is the work of American scholar Skocpol (1991), who contrasted the political failure of several selective policies in the US with the success of more universal 'cross-class' policies. According to Skocpol, the lack of sustained popular support is key to explaining these differences as the middle and non-poor working classes had no practical cause for agreeing to pay taxes for programmes narrowly targeted at poor families. The same argument underlies the famous 'Paradox of Redistribution' theory developed by the Swedish authors Korpi and Palme (1998), though their causal mechanism is more complex as it tries to explain cross-national variation in redistributive outcomes in advanced welfare states (see Gugushvili & Laenen, 2019). Similar to Skocpol, they argue that:

"Because marginal types of social policy programs are directed primarily at those below the poverty line, there is no rational base for a coalition between those above and those below the line. In effect, the poverty line splits the working class and tends to generate coalitions between better-off workers and the middle class against the lower sections of the working class, something which can result in tax revolts and backlash against the welfare state" (Korpi & Palme, 1998, p. 663).

In contrast, the 'institutional' (or universal) welfare model cements the electoral coalition between the middle and the whole of the working class, which in turn affects the volume of welfare spending and its sustainability over time. Hence, there is a paradox of redistribution: the more government target resources at the poor only, the less successful they are in reducing poverty and income inequality.

However, the institutional architecture of a welfare policy does not only determine what people find rational, but also what they find just from a moral point of view (Mau, 2003). Since humans are more than just a 'homo economicus', they are ready to contribute to the costs of welfare provision not only out of selfish, but also because of solidaristic considerations (Gevers et al., 2000; Kangas, 1997). However, for that a number of criteria have to be met: the goals of the policy measures have to be viewed as just (*substantive justice*), they must be implemented in a fair manner (*procedural justice*) and there has to be a reasonable dispersion of the costs of the policy (*just distribution of burdens*). According to Rothstein (1998, 2001, 2002), universalism scores higher than selectivism on each of

these three moral dimensions. First, most universal policies are regarded as more just from a substantive perspective, because they treat all citizens equally instead of splitting the population into two separate groups, as selective policies do (a poor and benefit-receiving minority versus a better-off and tax-paying majority). In doing so, the selective approach is said to foster the stigmatizing public image that welfare recipients are a different kind of people, whose moral worth is under constant scrutiny (Larsen, 2006). Second, the typical universal welfare scheme is supposed to be superior in terms of procedural justice because it is “a great deal simpler, cheaper and easier to implement than its selective counterpart” (Rothstein, 2002, p. 911), which tends to produce more-serious administrative problems such as arbitrary treatment and welfare fraud. Third, the universal welfare approach is generally praised for yielding a more just distribution of burdens, because it spreads the costs-benefits balance equally among the population: everyone pays taxes, but everyone also receives benefits. In the selective approach, by contrast, there is a clear imbalance in the cost-benefit dispersion: despite bearing their fair share of the tax burden, middle-income and high-income earners are denied welfare benefits and services, as those are targeted exclusively at low-income groups who pay little in taxes.

In sum, the two main theoretical mechanisms through which the institutional design of a welfare policy may influence its public support –self-interest and moral ideas– both seem to rule in favour of the universal welfare approach. First, because universal policies are targeted at relatively large segments of the population, they are of personal interest to most citizens, including the middle classes. Accordingly, universalism tends to generate broad class coalitions and high levels of popular support. Selective policies, by contrast, serve marginal groups of poor people only, thereby providing little incentive for the broader population to show support on the basis of self-interest. Second, universal welfare schemes are considered morally superior because they outperform selective schemes on the three crucial moral dimensions of substantive justice, procedural justice, and a just distribution of burdens.

3.2 Why selectivism is perhaps equally (or more) popular than universalism

Building on the same theoretical frameworks, one could, however, just as well argue that selective welfare policies are equally (or even more) popular than universal ones. First, a universal system is not necessarily the most optimal self-interested choice, at least not for middle-income and high-income earners. Although they benefit from universal provision (unlike selective provision, where they are excluded), they are also financing most of it (Rothstein, 2002). Especially in countries with progressive tax systems, middle-income and high-income categories may ultimately pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits. Given that people are generally tax-averse and react stronger to potential losses (in this case taxes) than to potential gains (in this case benefits and services), this could lead a large group of self-interested citizens to take a stance against universalism (Pierson, 1994).

Second, also the alleged moral superiority of the universal welfare approach is questionable. For each moral dimension discussed earlier, there are sound theoretical reasons to assume that citizens might think that selective policies are superior to universal ones. With regard to substantive justice, many may feel that targeting the poor is actually a more noble goal than distributing scarce public resources to all, including people who might not really need them (Goodin & Le Grand, 1987). Also from the perspective of

procedural justice, selective policies could be considered equally or even more appropriate, as their stricter eligibility rules might raise the impression that scarce resources are targeted more efficiently, at those who really need them. Finally, it is doubtful whether universalism truly yields a more just distribution of burdens in the eyes of the public. Particularly middle-income and high-income earners might come to feel overburdened because of the (disproportionately) high amount of taxes they have to pay in order to finance the universally accessible (and thus relatively expensive) welfare schemes. More generally, one could also contest whether the Nordic 'passion for equality' is also shared in other countries (Graubard, 1986). Indeed, it has been argued that not all societies perceive equality of outcomes as the ultimate normative yardstick (Aalberg, 2003). Take the Anglo-Saxon countries, for example, especially the USA, where people value equality of opportunities but not necessarily equality of outcomes (Lipset, 1996). In this view, unequal treatment is considered morally just as long as it reflects differences in the work efforts of people who had similar starting positions in life.

4 A critical discussion of the empirical evidence

Most studies that have examined popular support for universal vis-à-vis selective welfare provision can be classified into two broad categories. The first is what we call the *program comparison* approach and is about comparing popular support for (real-world or fictive) welfare programmes with different institutional designs. The second category, called the *policy principles* approach, probes support for universal and selective welfare provision by asking people what type of entitlement criteria should be used to organize different social benefits and services. In the following, we critically discuss the existing empirical studies in these two categories (see Appendix I for an overview).

4.1 The program comparison approach

At first sight, there seems to be solid evidence from the program comparison approach ruling in favour of universal welfare provision. A large number of public opinion studies, conducted in different countries and different years, reveals the same empirical pattern time and over again: universally targeted programmes, such as most old-age pensions and health care systems, consistently enjoy higher public support than selective programmes, such as means-tested social assistance and housing allowances (Blomberg & Kroll, 1999a, 1999b; Forma, 1997; Hedegaard, 2014; Hudson et al., 2016; Pettersen, 2001; Rothstein, 2002, 2001, Svallfors, 1991, 2011; Ulrich, 2002). Based on such studies, many social policy experts seem to take for granted that universal policies are more popular and thus politically less vulnerable than selective policies (see Clasen & van Oorschot, 2002, p. 97; Korpi & Palme, 1998, p. 682; Nelson, 2004, p. 375; Svallfors, 2012, p. 6 for some prominent examples).

However, these studies may be criticized for conflating institutional design with target group: the programmes they compare do not only differ in terms of their design, but also in the groups they target (Greenstein, 1991; Laenen, 2018; Larsen, 2006). This makes it 'hard to disentangle whether it is the characteristics of the program or whether it is the characteristics of the clientele that is decisive' (Kangas, 2003, p. 726). This is important in light of the mounting evidence showing that support for welfare programmes also depends on the perceived deservingness of their target groups (Jeene, 2015; Laenen, 2020; van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot et al. 2017). A large body of literature reveals the existence of a universal rank order in the perceived deservingness of various primary target groups of the welfare state (Coughlin, 1980; Jaeger, 2007; Laenen & Meuleman, 2017; van Oorschot, 2006). National and comparative social surveys consistently show that elderly people constitute the most deserving group with nearly unanimous support from the public, closely followed by sick and disabled people. Families with children, unemployed people, poor families and single mothers appear considerably lower in the ranking and more-recent studies show that migrants are perceived as the least deserving of social welfare. As a result, we still do not know, for example, whether most pensions and health care arrangements are popular because of their universal design, because they are targeted at groups perceived to be deserving, or because of a combination of both factors.

A few studies have tried to circumvent this problem by studying real-world welfare programmes with different institutional designs but similar target groups. What they seem to find is that universal and selective policies with the same target group receive almost

equal levels of public support. In the American context, Gilens (1999) notes very little difference in the popularity of social benefits targeted exclusively at *poor* elderly and sick people (i.e. Supplemental Social Security Income and Medicaid), and benefits that are targeted more broadly and include also the *middle-class* elderly and sick (i.e. Social Security and Medicare). In a similar vein, Coughlin (1980) reports striking cross-national similarities in public support for pension and health care systems in his international review of public opinion studies, despite the fact that the countries under study have very diverging institutional designs in place. It is striking, for example, that the fully means-tested Australian pension received almost equal levels of support as the universal Danish pension. More recently, vignette and conjoint experiments have been used to compare public support for hypothetical (but realistic) welfare schemes with diverging institutional designs. What these studies demonstrate is that there often is a slight preference for selective over universal welfare provision. Muñoz & Pardos-Prado (2019), for one, show that in the UK support for means-tested child benefits (going to poor children only) is significantly higher than support for universal child benefits (for all children, independent of their parents' financial means).¹ Likewise, Greenberg (2018) found a higher level of support for means-tested preschool services than for universal services in the United States – although the difference was small (35% preferred means-tested over universal preschool, 29% favoured universalism over means testing, and 36% had no clear preference for either policy design option). Also outside the 'liberal' world of welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990), there is experimental evidence suggesting that selectivism is the more-popular policy design option. Most notably, Gallego & Marx (2017) found that Spanish citizens generally prefer labour market programmes (LMPs) that are targeted at the most needy unemployed over universal LMPs for all unemployed. However, they do argue that the greater support for means-tested LMPs might be specific to Spain, because its crisis-ridden economy and labour market may have made people more reluctant to distribute benefits to those who might not really need them.

4.2 The policy principles approach

The second broad category of studies has taken a different approach by asking people which underlying policy principles should be used to organize (differently targeted) benefits and services. Some have tried to do this more generally, for the entire welfare state. Most recently, data from the 2016 European Social Survey (ESS) show that almost half of the European population agrees that social benefits and services (without further specification) should only be provided for people on the lowest incomes, leaving people with middle and higher incomes to fend for themselves. There is, however, a large variation across countries: the proportion consenting to strictly selective welfare provision ranges from 65% in Italy to 22% in the Netherlands (Gugushvili & van Oorschot, 2020). The fact that selectivism is rather popular in some countries was also demonstrated by Goul Andersen (2011), who showed that about 70% of the Danish population considers it just to target welfare support to the poorest rather than giving it to everybody. However, underneath this

¹ It should be noted, however, that the greater popularity of means-tested child benefit provision disappears when respondents were told that "a growing percentage of the recipient families are of immigrant origin". In case of the immigration framing, means-tested and universal provision were equally popular.

apparent consensus for a selective welfare state loom large differences across policy domains. Clear majorities of the Danish population chose universal access for all citizens in the case of old-age pensions, early retirement allowances, unemployment benefits, disability pensions and student benefits. When it came to social assistance and child benefits, by contrast, there was a slight preference for selective targeting to those in economic need. Goul Andersen (2011) also shows, however, that in some policy domains, popular preferences changed over time. A case in point are student and child benefits, where the proportion preferring means testing dropped from respectively 30% and 64% in 2000 to 23% and 58% in 2008.

Also in other countries, studies have revealed similar patterns of cross-domain variation in popular preferences for universal and selective welfare provision. Kangas (1995) found that support for increased means testing varied across welfare programmes, with housing allowances (73.1%) and social assistance (69.1%) on top, followed by old-age pensions (53.4%), child allowances (53.1%), unemployment benefits (51%) and sickness insurance (42.1%). In the Finnish context, with its universal welfare model (Esping-Andersen, 1990), it might seem surprising that relatively large segments of the population are so eager to increase means testing. According to Kangas (1995), however, this could be due to the fact that the survey question referred to the need for public expenditure reduction, which might have made respondents exceptionally supportive of means testing. This might help explain why another Finnish study (Forma, 1999), using a different question format, found that support for universal old-age pensions was much higher than support for selective pensions: while 76% of the Finnish population agreed that giving a pension to everyone over 65 would be a good policy, only 30% thought the same about giving a pension only to poor people. Also in Australia and Poland, there is very little support for selective old-age pensions (34.2% and 24.7% respectively), and considerably higher support for universal provision (51.7% in and 50.7% respectively) (Forma & Kangas, 1999). The fact that most people prefer universal over selective provision in the field of old-age pensions was also documented in Belgium by Van Hootegem, Abts & Meuleman (2020). When asked how the government should organize the pension system, a small majority (58.4%) answered that “everyone should get a reasonable pension that is equal for all”, while only 4.6% wanted their government to provide a “minimal pension for the poor elderly that covers only their basic needs”.² A comparable pattern was found in the policy domain of unemployment protection: about half of the Belgian population opted for equal, reasonable and universally accessible unemployment benefits instead of minimal, selectively targeted benefits (which is nonetheless supported by one out of five Belgians).

In a similar vein, there is very strong support for universal access to public health care: 82% of the Belgian population felt that there should be “equal and reasonable health care for everyone”. Selective provision of health care, by contrast is unpopular: only 8.1% thinks

² As the attentive reader will undoubtedly notice, the percentages reported here do not add up to 100. This is because respondents were given a third policy design option, namely that of insurance-based welfare provision. For the sake of completeness, it is worth noting that 36.9% of the Belgian population opted for ‘a higher pension for people who have earned and contributed more’, 29% did the same for unemployment benefits, and 9.9% wanted better health care for people with higher contributions. Additionally, it should be noted that the authors conflate eligibility with generosity, by mentioning in the answer categories that universally accessible benefits are also ‘reasonable’, while selective benefits are only ‘marginal’.

it would be a good idea to provide only “minimal basic health care for people who are truly in need”. Such strong popular opposition to selective health care systems has also been reported in cross-national research. Gevers and colleagues (2000), for example, used data from the Eurobarometer to show that there is majority support for universal provision of health care in all 13 countries included in their study (see also Mau, 2003, p. 175). It is clear that most citizens want their governments to provide health care to all legal residents (irrespective of their income), instead of providing it only to legal residents with a low income. There is, however, some cross-national variation in these popular preferences. In Sweden and Spain, more than 90% of the population prefers universal over selective provision of health care. In most other countries, this figure ranges somewhere between 70% and 90% (in descending order: Greece, Denmark, Great Britain, Finland, the Netherlands, France, West-Germany Italy, Portugal). From a comparative perspective, support for universal access to health care is lowest in Austria (65%) and Ireland (59%).

5 Conclusion and discussion

This working paper started from the frequently cited assumption in social policy literature that universal programmes are more popular and thus politically more sustainable than selective programmes because they generate broader self-interested coalitions and are considered morally superior. Our critical discussion shows, however, that the social legitimacy of universal vis-à-vis selective welfare policies remains very much an open question, to be investigated further in future research. The reason for this is twofold.

First, we argue that the empirical studies that are commonly cited to support the claim that universal welfare provision is more popular than selective provision are inconclusive, because they conflate the institutional designs of welfare programmes with their respective target groups. Perhaps old-age pensions and health care schemes generally receive higher levels of public support than social assistance and housing allowances not because they are more universal in design, but because they are targeted at primary groups that are generally considered as highly deserving by the public (i.e. the old and the sick). Although some have already tried (see for example Gilens, 1996), future research should continue to disentangle policy design and target group deservingness even further. The basic hypothesis would be that popular support is highest for universal schemes that target groups perceived to be deserving (e.g. universal pensions), lowest for selective schemes geared towards less deserving groups (e.g. means-tested unemployment benefits), and in-between for universal schemes with less deserving targets (e.g. universal unemployment benefits) and selective schemes with deserving targets (e.g. means-tested pensions). To test this empirically, researchers could compare the social legitimacy of real-world programmes with different institutional designs but similar target groups, or vice versa, with similar designs but different targets. However, this is not always a feasible option, especially not for national studies, as they are bounded by the policy reality that not all countries have the necessary variety in institutional designs to compare real-world programmes. To deal with this challenge, researchers might start developing survey experiments in which respondents read and rate vignettes of fictive (but realistic) welfare schemes that randomly vary in terms of both institutional design and target group. Such vignette experiments would provide much stronger tests of the assumption that universal welfare policies are more popular than selective ones, because they also take into account the varying levels of perceived deservingness of the policies' primary target groups.

Second, our discussion clearly demonstrates that the social legitimacy of universal and selective welfare provision differs across countries (for example Gugushvili & van Oorschot, 2020), across time (for example Goul Andersen, 2011), and across policy domains (for example Kangas, 1995). This suggests that a universally valid answer simply does not exist: it is not the case that one social policy design option is more popular than the other, always and everywhere. Instead, the task for future research is to scrutinize *under which circumstances* –when, where and why– one policy design option is more popular than the other. To date, we know surprisingly little about the contextual drivers of popular preferences regarding the institutional design of welfare policies. There is some (albeit very limited) evidence that the cross-national, cross-temporal and cross-domain variation in popular preferences is to some extent driven by the institutional design of the existing welfare policies people are exposed to. Forma & Kangas (1999), for example, found that although most Australian, Finnish and Polish citizens preferred universal

pension provision, the popularity of means-tested pensions varied across the three nations, with 'liberal' Australia leading in support, followed by 'social-democratic' Finland and 'post-communist' Poland. The fact that Australians were the firmest defenders of selectivism, while the Finnish were the strongest supporters of universalism was interpreted as a clear indication that public opinion is "contaminated by some kind of institutionalized nationalism: the present ways of doing things [...] get stronger support than other forms of social policy solutions" (Forma & Kangas, 1999, p. 166). A similar interpretation was made by Kangas (1995), who found that Finnish citizens mainly wanted to increase means testing in those policy areas that were already heavily means-tested (e.g. social assistance). At the same time, however, about half of the Finnish population also pushed for more means testing in some of the most universal welfare schemes (e.g. old-age pensions), potentially because they feel overburdened by the taxes imposed on them to sustain such schemes. These findings seem to be in line with the central tenets of policy feedback theory, which argues that existing public policies influence the attitudes of citizens – either in a positive, self-reinforcing way, or in a negative, self-undermining way (Campbell, 2012; Kumlin & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014). In contrast, a more recent comparative study by Gugushvili & van Oorschot (2020) found that the extent to which a welfare state relies on means testing has no effect on individual preferences for a fully means-tested welfare provision. Yet, this study also found that country context matters: support for complete means-testing was higher in countries with lower social spending and higher incidence of poverty, which the authors interpret as an indication of 'immaturity' of the welfare state.

To derive more decisive conclusions, future research should strive to take this type of institutional analysis several steps further. Here, we propose two different research strategies (which may also be combined). The first is to use longitudinal (panel) data to study how over-time trends in public policies (and the political discourses surrounding them) are related to over-time changes and continuities in public opinion. Do changes in the institutional design of a welfare scheme temporally precede changes in popular preferences, or is it the other way around, as policy responsiveness scholars would argue (Brooks & Manza, 2007)? The second strategy is to examine the policy-opinion link from a cross-national perspective: how is the *preferred* policy design related to the *existing* policy design in different countries? For example, if country A has a universal child benefit and country B has a selective, means-tested one, how is this then reflected in the opinions of the citizens living in the respective countries? By applying the cross-national and the longitudinal strategy (especially in combination), we will ultimately be able to make stronger claims about the causal relationship between welfare institutions and welfare attitudes – which is something that most prior research struggled to accomplish (Kumlin & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014).

Finally, it is worth noting that we have focused on popular attitudes towards two specific types of welfare provision on the universalism-selectivism continuum: fully-fledged universal policies accessible to all citizens/residents that encounter a certain social risk, and strict means-tested policies targeted exclusively at people living in poverty. The reason for that is simple: it is mainly these policies that have been the object of previous public opinion studies. Future research should, however, also look into the social legitimacy of the many in-between welfare schemes that exist in the real world (see Marchal & Van Lancker, 2019 for an insightful overview). For example, we know very little about popular preferences regarding universal policies that also provide means-tested supplements for poor people, often referred to as 'targeting within universalism' (Skocpol, 1991), or about attitudes towards selective policies that are geared towards excluding the affluent instead of targeting only the poor ('affluence testing'). Likewise, our discussion largely ignores

alternative policy designs that are more difficult to situate on the universalism-selectivism scale. Most importantly, future studies should examine in more detail how universal, citizenship-based and selective, means-tested programmes relate to contributory social insurance programmes in terms of their popularity (see Laenen, 2018). Finally, future research should also bring the most extreme and currently most debated type of social policy on the universalism-selectivism continuum –the universal basic income– into the equation. Despite the rapidly increasing political relevance of basic income, relatively little is known about its popularity among the general public³, especially not in relation to selective, means-tested welfare policies.

³ Although the number of studies looking into the social legitimacy of the universal basic income is steadily rising, we know next to nothing about its relative popularity compared to means-tested welfare policies.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix I. Overview of the public opinion studies discussed

Study	Data	Relevant findings																						
1 1a	<i>The program comparison approach</i> <i>Real-world programs</i>																							
Blomberg & Kroll (1999a, p. 326) *see also Blomberg & Kroll (1999b, p. 65, 77)	Finnish surveys conducted between 1992-1996, which asked respondents whether they would resist cuts in different municipal social services.	<p>Table 1. <i>Attitudes of the population towards cuts and reductions in municipal services (n = 1,024).</i></p> <table><tr><th>Proportion of respondents who:</th><th>Per cent</th></tr><tr><td>Prefer services to be increased rather than reduced</td><td>56</td></tr><tr><td>Prefer raised taxes instead of reduced services</td><td>59</td></tr><tr><td>Do not accept reductions in the number of service-providing personnel in order to improve the economy of their own municipality</td><td>60</td></tr><tr><td>Do not accept reductions in service provision in order to improve the economy of their own municipality</td><td>45</td></tr><tr><td>Do not accept increased user fees in order to improve the economy of their own municipality</td><td>42</td></tr><tr><td>Resist cuts in child day care (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)</td><td>78</td></tr><tr><td>Resist cuts in health care (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)</td><td>74</td></tr><tr><td>Resist cuts in elderly care (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)</td><td>87</td></tr><tr><td>Resist cuts in social assistance (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)</td><td>44</td></tr><tr><td>Resist cuts in education (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)</td><td>81</td></tr></table>	Proportion of respondents who:	Per cent	Prefer services to be increased rather than reduced	56	Prefer raised taxes instead of reduced services	59	Do not accept reductions in the number of service-providing personnel in order to improve the economy of their own municipality	60	Do not accept reductions in service provision in order to improve the economy of their own municipality	45	Do not accept increased user fees in order to improve the economy of their own municipality	42	Resist cuts in child day care (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)	78	Resist cuts in health care (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)	74	Resist cuts in elderly care (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)	87	Resist cuts in social assistance (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)	44	Resist cuts in education (on condition that the municipal economy requires it)	81
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Forma (1997, p. 240, 244-5)	A Finnish survey conducted in 1993, which asked respondents about the desirability of cutting back different social transfers.	<p>"The resistance against cuts in means-tested social assistance is lower in comparison to the universal services".</p> <p>"Our hypothesis receives qualified support: universal benefits (e.g. family benefits, pension) are more legitimate than selective ones (e.g. housing assistance, social assistance). However, if we look at the results more carefully, we notice that the basic unemployment benefit, study allowance and basic sickness allowance are also highly legitimate."</p> <p>"In general, universal benefits are more strongly supported than selective ones".</p> <p>"According to our analysis, popular support for selective transfer schemes is weak: transfer schemes for the poor, targeted social assistance and housing allowance also have low legitimacy."</p>																						

Hedegaard (2014, p. 371)

A Danish survey (unspecified from which year), which asked respondents whether they thought different social benefits were too generous, suitable, or too low.

Table 1. Attitudes towards the Social Benefits Presented as Percentage Points and Opinion Balances

	Too generous	Suitable	Too low	Opinion balance	N
Social assistance	36	48	16	-20	897
Incapacity benefit	13	60	27	14	801
Unemployment benefit	12	60	28	16	915
State education grant	7	60	33	26	987
State pension	2	38	60	58	983

"Policy design might be the most promising explanation for the ranking in Table 1 as the two social benefits with the highest support also are universal benefits [state pensions and state educational grant], while the three least supported are either selective or contributions-based [unemployment benefit, incapacity benefit, social assistance]. Furthermore, this provides a possible explanation for the differences in the support of the social assistance and unemployment benefits, which though (basically) targeted at the unemployed, enjoy very different levels of support".

Hudson et al. (2016, p. 698)

Different British social surveys from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Figure 2

Selected responses to 1957/58 PEP Survey

		“There were differences in opinion towards universal services/benefits versus those that were targeted and contributory versus non-contributory benefits/services (figure 2). Despite fewer households making use of the non-contributory benefit or, perhaps, because of this they were more often picked out as being areas where the government spent too much money: 20 per cent saying this was so for Family Allowances (by far the most common choice), 7 per cent for National Assistance and just 2 per cent for National Insurance”.																																																		
Pettersen (2001, p. 48)	A Norwegian survey conducted in the mid-1990s, which probed respondents' support for a number of social welfare programmes in different ways.	Whatever indicator is used, similar levels of popularity are revealed, and four levels of approval are identified. The most well-liked programmes, for which a substantial majority would prefer more government spending and a majority allocate at least some of their NOK1,000, are of the universal kind. Next follows a group of four programmes endorsed by around 50 percent. These programmes are a mixed bag of needs-tested services, such as public work for the unemployed, day care centres for children, and means or needs tested income transfer programmes for widows and disabled persons. The third group of programmes, child allowances and support for single parents, are less popular in that only one-third express a preference for government to spend more on these two programmes. The fourth group, of least popular programmes, consists of income maintenance programmes for people without work or else without the ability to provide for themselves. Only between 10 and 20 percent want to expand unemployment benefits and social welfare benefits and a slightly larger proportion (one in five) wants to reduce them. [...]. This popularity pattern among welfare state programmes is far from being unique to Norway. Where programme popularity has been studied a common finding is that universal programmes like pensions, public health insurance and child/family allowances are the most popular, even if they are also the most expensive, while a combination of needs and/or means tested programmes like unemployment benefits, single parent benefits and social welfare are the least popular programmes”.																																																		
Rothstein (2001, p. 228) *see also Rothstein (2002, p. 913-14)	Swedish surveys conducted between 1981 and 1997, which asked whether expenditure on different social benefits and services should be increased, held the same, or reduced.	<div><div><div>Table 2. Attitudes toward public expenditures</div><div>The survey instrument posed the following question: ‘Taxes are used for various purposes. Do you think the revenues spent on the purposes mentioned below should be increased, held the same, or reduced?’ The figures in the table represent the percentage of those wishing to increase expenditures minus the percentage of those wishing to reduce them.</div><table><tr><td></td><td colspan="4">Year</td></tr><tr><td>Program</td><td>1981</td><td>1986</td><td>1992</td><td>1997</td></tr><tr><td>Health care</td><td>+42</td><td>+44</td><td>+48</td><td>+75</td></tr><tr><td>Support for the elderly</td><td>+29</td><td>+33</td><td>+58</td><td>+68</td></tr><tr><td>Support to families with children</td><td>+19</td><td>+35</td><td>+17</td><td>+30</td></tr><tr><td>Housing allowances</td><td>–23</td><td>–23</td><td>–25</td><td>–20</td></tr><tr><td>Social assistance</td><td>–5</td><td>–5</td><td>–13</td><td>+0</td></tr><tr><td>Primary and secondary education</td><td>+20</td><td>+30</td><td>+49</td><td>+69</td></tr><tr><td>Employment policy</td><td>+63</td><td>+46</td><td>+55</td><td>+27</td></tr><tr><td>State and municipal administration</td><td>–54</td><td>–53</td><td>–68</td><td>–65</td></tr></table></div></div>		Year				Program	1981	1986	1992	1997	Health care	+42	+44	+48	+75	Support for the elderly	+29	+33	+58	+68	Support to families with children	+19	+35	+17	+30	Housing allowances	–23	–23	–25	–20	Social assistance	–5	–5	–13	+0	Primary and secondary education	+20	+30	+49	+69	Employment policy	+63	+46	+55	+27	State and municipal administration	–54	–53	–68	–65
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		<p>"Support for the universal programs (i.e. health care, support for the elderly, support for families with children, primary and secondary education) is unambiguously strong and stable, but the opposite is true for the two selective programs (i.e. housing allowances and social assistance)".</p>																																																																								
Svallfors (1991, p. 612-13)	Swedish surveys conducted in 1981 and 1986, which asked whether government expenditure on different social benefits and services should be increased, held the same, or reduced.	<p>TABLE 1: <i>Attitudes to public expenditure. Answers to the question 'Taxes are used for different purposes. Do you think that the amount of tax money used for the following purposes should be increased, remain unaltered, or decreased?' (%)</i>. (n = 978–84)</p>																																																																								
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		<p><i>Note: * Percentage difference between those wanting to increase and those wanting to decrease expenditure.</i></p> <p>"Central and universal policies such as health care, support for elderly and families with children, education and employment policies all enjoy very strong support. Many want to spend even more money on these policies, and proponents of cutbacks are very few. In most cases this strong support has become even stronger in 1986 compared to 1981. [...] Housing allowances and social assistance are much less popular than the other policies, bureaucratic administration of public programs excepted".</p>																																																																								

Svallfors (2011, p. 811)	Swedish surveys conducted between 1981 and 2010, which asked whether government expenditure on different social benefits and services should be increased, held the same, or reduced.	<table><tr><th colspan="7">Table 1</th></tr><tr><th colspan="7">Attitudes to public expenditure. Answers to the question ‘Taxes are used for different purposes. Do you think that the amount of tax money used for the following purposes should be increased, remain the same or decreased?’</th></tr><tr><th>Wanting to increase spending (+) (%) Wanting to decrease it (–) (%)</th><th>1981</th><th>1986</th><th>1992</th><th>1997</th><th>2002</th><th>2010</th></tr><tr><td>Medical and health care</td><td>+45 –3</td><td>+47 –4</td><td>+53 –4</td><td>+77 –2</td><td>+79 –2</td><td>+66 –2</td></tr><tr><td>Support for elderly (pensions, care for the elderly)</td><td>+30 –1</td><td>+37 –3</td><td>+60 –2</td><td>+70 –2</td><td>+70 –1</td><td>+70 –2</td></tr><tr><td>Support for families with children (child allowances, child care)</td><td>+31 –12</td><td>+43 –8</td><td>+32 –15</td><td>+41 –11</td><td>+34 –8</td><td>+27 –8</td></tr><tr><td>Housing allowances</td><td>+13 –36</td><td>+13 –36</td><td>+13 –38</td><td>+14 –34</td><td>+8 –48</td><td>+11 –25</td></tr><tr><td>Social assistance</td><td>+16 –22</td><td>+17 –22</td><td>+13 –26</td><td>+21 –21</td><td>+15 –21</td><td>+22 –15</td></tr><tr><td>Comprehensive and secondary schooling</td><td>+26 –7</td><td>+32 –2</td><td>+50 –1</td><td>+70 –1</td><td>+71 –1</td><td>+60 –1</td></tr><tr><td>Employment policies</td><td>+69 –6</td><td>+56 –10</td><td>+62 –7</td><td>+47 –20</td><td>+34 –19</td><td>+45 –9</td></tr><tr><td>State and local government administration</td><td>+2 –56</td><td>+2 –55</td><td>+3 –71</td><td>+3 –68</td><td>+3 –62</td><td>+3 –58</td></tr><tr><td>(n-minimum)</td><td>(949)</td><td>(978)</td><td>(1489)</td><td>(1297)</td><td>(1070)</td><td>(3754)</td></tr></table>	Table 1							Attitudes to public expenditure. Answers to the question ‘Taxes are used for different purposes. Do you think that the amount of tax money used for the following purposes should be increased, remain the same or decreased?’							Wanting to increase spending (+) (%) Wanting to decrease it (–) (%)	1981	1986	1992	1997	2002	2010	Medical and health care	+45 –3	+47 –4	+53 –4	+77 –2	+79 –2	+66 –2	Support for elderly (pensions, care for the elderly)	+30 –1	+37 –3	+60 –2	+70 –2	+70 –1	+70 –2	Support for families with children (child allowances, child care)	+31 –12	+43 –8	+32 –15	+41 –11	+34 –8	+27 –8	Housing allowances	+13 –36	+13 –36	+13 –38	+14 –34	+8 –48	+11 –25	Social assistance	+16 –22	+17 –22	+13 –26	+21 –21	+15 –21	+22 –15	Comprehensive and secondary schooling	+26 –7	+32 –2	+50 –1	+70 –1	+71 –1	+60 –1	Employment policies	+69 –6	+56 –10	+62 –7	+47 –20	+34 –19	+45 –9	State and local government administration	+2 –56	+2 –55	+3 –71	+3 –68	+3 –62	+3 –58	(n-minimum)	(949)	(978)	(1489)	(1297)	(1070)	(3754)
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Ulrich (2001, p. 11)	A cross-national survey (i.e. <i>the International Social Survey Programme, Role of Government II</i>) conducted in 9 different countries in 1996, which asked respondents about the degree to which government should be responsible for and spend money on different social provisions.	“The universality thesis, in contrast, is much more confirmed. Universal welfare programmes enjoy, without exception, in all welfare states a high level of public support. But again, there are some unexpected findings like a fairly high acceptance of educational assistance (for students) and of housing allowance schemes, even though both are rather selective. Thus, a broad coverage and the universality of benefits are a sufficient but not necessary condition for a broad public acceptance of welfare programmes”.																																																																																				
Gilens (1999, p. 42-5)	American surveys in the 1990s, which asked respondents about government expenditure on different social benefits.	<p>“[...] when Americans are asked about specific existing programs that are targeted at the poor or that provide benefits to the middle class as well. For example, Social Security and SSI both provide cash support for the elderly and the disabled, but Social Security is a universal program while only the poor are eligible for SSI. Contrary to the self-interest hypothesis, SSI receives just as strong support as Social Security. In one survey respondents were asked whether spending should be increased or decreased for Social Security and for SSI. In each case 57% said spending should be increased and only 3% said spending should be decreased. The high level of support for SSI is especially impressive because, unlike Social Security, SSI is not a contributory program and therefore does not carry the implication that recipients have earned their benefits”.</p> <p>Another set of parallel programs consists of Medicare, available to all Americans eligible for Social Security, and Medicaid, which provides medical benefits only to the poor. Surveys show that Medicare receives somewhat more</p>																																																																																				

support from the public, but Medicaid nonetheless garners strong public support even among middle-class respondents, few of whom would expect to benefit from the program themselves".

"We find at most a small deficit in support for means-tested programs compared to similar universal programs. There is, thus, little evidence to support an account of welfare politics that rests on the perceived economic self-interest of the middle class".

Coughlin (1980, p. 118-9)

A review of social surveys conducted in 8 different countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and West-Germany) in the 1960s and 1970s.

Table 3.22
ALL NATIONS: ORDINAL RANKING OF
PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR WELFARE PROGRAMS

Relative Level of Public Support for Social Policy Principles ^a	Ordinal Ranking ^b				
	Old-Age Pensions	National Health Care	Family Allowances	Unemployment Compensation	Public Assistance
<i>Highest support</i>					
West Germany	High	High	N.A.	N.A.	(Medium)
France	High	(High) ^c	(High)	N.A.	(High)
<i>High support</i>					
Sweden	High	N.A.	High	N.A.	N.A.
Denmark	High	High	N.A.	(Medium)	(Low)
Australia	High	Medium	High	N.A.	N.A.
United Kingdom	High	High	Low	(Low)	Low
<i>Medium support</i>					
Canada	High	High	High	Medium to low	Low
<i>Low to medium support</i>					
United States	High	Medium to high	—	Low	Low

"Our findings for old-age pensions contradict a number of explanations that have been proffered over the years to account for their popularity – or at minimum, acceptability – among the public. One explanation has linked the universality of pensions to public acceptance of government intervention in this area. Implicit in this contention is the notion that universal coverage of the population eliminates the stigma of "relief" while simultaneously providing an incentive of universal self-interest. Another explanation, often heard in the US but not unknown in other nations, holds that pensions are popular because they are based on a contributory principle, and potential opposition is circumvented by the right to a benefit contingent on contributions paid into the system during an individual's active work life. Neither of these propositions fares well in a comparative perspective. For example, Australia not only has a selective pension program which (as previously mentioned) confers benefits only after application of a means test, but it also finances the program entirely out of general revenues. In contrast, Denmark's pension scheme is financed without benefit of a separate pension fund with earmarked contributions, although it covers a greater proportion of the population than the Australian system. In both nations, of course, the programs are widely popular among the public. [...] Similarly, for national health care schemes there exists a strikingly uniform pattern of attitudes across nations that diverge greatly in public policy".

1b Fictive programs		
Muñoz & Pardos-Prado (2019, p. 718)	A British vignette experiment conducted in 2013, which presented respondents with vignettes of differently organized child benefits and asked them whether these benefits should be removed, reduced, maintained, or expanded.	"Means-tested programs are significantly more popular than universal programs when immigrants are not primed as beneficiaries, but are equally popular when immigrants are primed. This implies that, contrary to common wisdom, means-testing does not make social benefits more vulnerable to cut-backs in a context of welfare state retrenchment".
Greenberg (2018, p. 6)	An American vignette experiment conducted in 2013, which presented respondents with vignettes of differently organized public preschool service programs and asked them to what extent they support or oppose government funding for these programs.	"More than one third (35%) of respondents favor targeted over universal preschool, whereas 29% favor universal over targeted. The plurality of respondents, 36%, has no preference. These respondents are more likely to favor than oppose both approaches".
Gallego & Marx (2017, p. 1037, 1044)	A Spanish vignette experiment conducted in 2014, which presented respondents with vignettes of policy proposals for differently organized labour market (or unemployment benefit) programs and asked them to indicate which proposals they preferred.	<p>"Relative to a universal programme that includes all residents in Spain, targeting the policy to members of households in which no member receives a salary or pension increases support for the reform. This suggests that respondents support means-tested programmes aimed at the most needy" (p. 1037).</p> <p>"We have studied LMP [labour market policy] preferences in a rather specific macro-economic context, namely post-crisis Spain. The devastating labour market conditions could lead to a strong perception of the unemployed as 'deserving poor' which might compress heterogeneity in preference and explain the strong support for targeted benefits" (p. 1044).</p>
2 The policy principles approach		
Gugushvili & van Oorschot (2020, p. 15-6)	A cross-national survey (i.e. <i>European Social Survey Round 8</i>) conducted in 23 countries in 2016/17, which asked respondents whether they agree that government should only provide social benefits and services for people on the lowest incomes, leaving people with middle and higher incomes to fend for themselves.	

Figure 1. Average support by country for a fully means-tested welfare provision

Goul Andersen (2011, p. 14-6) Danish surveys conducted in 2000 and 2008, which asked (a) whether it would be just to target welfare support to those most in need instead of providing it to everybody, and (b) whether different social benefits should be given to everybody, or only to those in need.

"Despite the proposal being radical, almost half of the respondents (45 percent) in the pooled sample support the idea of complete means testing of welfare provision. Moreover, in six countries—five of which are, in the words of Arts and Gelissen (2001), "immature" welfare states in Southern and Eastern Europe—more than half of the respondents are in favor of the fully means-tested model. The strongest support for means testing is found in Italy (65 percent), Hungary (62 percent), and Lithuania (61 percent). Conversely, the proposal receives the least support in the "mature" regimes of the Netherlands (22 percent), Norway (30 percent), Belgium (30 percent), and Austria (33 percent)".

Table 1. How just is universalism vs. targeting to the poor? 2000. (N=1235).

How just or unjust is it ..	Very unjust 0-2	Rather unjust 3-4	neutral 5	Rather just 6-7	Very just 8-10	Average Score 0-10
Targeting welfare support to the most poor rather than giving to everybody	8	7	16	21	48	6.89
That all Danes aged more than 67 receive the basic amount of the state pension ("people's pension")	6	4	6	9	75	8.30

"It turns out that only 15 per cent answer in favour of universalism whereas 69 per cent support targeting. 84 per cent felt that the basic state pension should be paid to everybody. Only 10 per cent found universalism unjust in this case".

Table 2. Universalism of Cash Benefits. Should benefits be a right for everybody or be given only according to economic need?

		Right for everybody	Only according to economic need	Don't know	PDI
Pensions: Basic amount	2000	78	21	1	57
	2008	78	19	3	59
Unemployment benefits	2000	75	24	1	51
	2008	74	22	4	52
Early retirement allowance	2000	73	25	2	48
Students' benefits	2000	70	30	0	40
	2008	74	23	3	51
Disability pension	2000	67	32	1	35
Rebates for pens., such as coll. transp.	2000	55	44	1	11
Social assistance	2000	44	55	1	-11
Child benefits	2000	34	64	2	-30
	2008	39	58	3	-19
"Now there is a question regarding whether social benefirs like people's pension, unemployment benefits etc. should be a right for everybody or only be granted according to economic need so that the benefit lapses for people who can mangage on their own (for instance because of spouse's income)"					

Although reference to spouse's income might exaggerate resistance to means testing a little bit, findings in table 2 suggest that general principles and specific attitudes are two different worlds. According to three quarters of the respondents people should have universal rights to pensions (basic amount), unemployment benefits, and early retirement allowance (as they currently do). Two of these questions were repeated in the 2008 survey with almost identical results. There is also a clear majority (two-thirds) against means testing in the case of disability pension (which is currently not completely universal in Denmark)".

"Social assistance, by contrast, has always been means tested, and much more strictly so than other benefits as it is tested not only against income (including spouse's income), but also against property. Although the majority accepts the status quo, it is revealing that a sizable minority (44 per cent) advocates universal social assistance".

Kangas (1995, p. 303-4)

A Finnish survey conducted in 1993, which asked respondents whether means testing should be increased in different social benefit schemes

Table 2. Should means-testing be increased? Distribution of opinions (%) by socio-economic group.

(n)	All (1,117)	Farmers (138)	Workers (290)	White-collar workers	
				lower (543)	upper (146)
Pensions***					
yes	53.4	52.3	62.1	53.0	39.2
no	38.1	36.7	29.8	38.9	52.7
no opinion	8.5	10.9	8.2	8.1	8.1
Child allowances					
yes	53.1	57.5	54.4	52.5	48.6
no	41.2	35.4	39.9	41.3	48.6
no opinion	5.7	7.1	5.7	6.2	2.8
Sickness insurance*					
yes	42.1	48.4	45.3	39.9	38.5
no	48.3	41.3	42.8	50.7	56.1
no opinion	9.6	10.3	11.9	9.4	5.4
Unemployment benefits***					
yes	51.0	60.8	53.2	48.6	46.6
no	41.0	25.4	36.5	44.8	50.0
no opinion	8.0	13.8	10.3	6.6	3.4
Housing allowances**					
yes	73.1	76.4	64.0	75.8	78.2
no	20.6	15.0	26.1	19.3	19.7
no opinion	6.2	8.7	9.9	4.9	2.1
Social assistance**					
yes	69.1	70.0	63.3	69.5	78.4
no	21.9	16.9	24.7	22.7	18.2
no opinion	8.9	13.1	12.0	7.9	3.4

Note: Asterisks indicate the statistical significance of the differences. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

"The general tendency seems to be that tougher means-testing is wanted in those areas that already involve selectivity. This finding is in accordance with our hypothesis about the greater popularity of universal schemes compared to 'welfare backlash'-prone selective benefits. However, increased selectivity is also desired for benefits that are currently universal

		On the whole, it can be considered surprising that more than half of all respondents are willing to increase means-testing in the most universal pension and child allowance programs. One reason for the unexpectedly high acceptance of means-testing, even in the universal schemes, may be the wording of the question. The introductory part of the question pertained to the need to reduce public expenditure, which obviously created a more favorable frame for means testing").							
Forma (1999, p. 94)	A Finnish survey conducted in 1994, which asked respondents whether government should provide (a) no old-age pensions at all, (b) means-tested pensions, and (c) universal pensions.	<i>Table 5.1</i> Opinions on entitlement rules of national pension. Percent shares of positive attitudes. (Values within parentheses are p-values)							
		<i>Citizens</i>	<i>Candid-ates</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Research</i>	<i>Admin-istration</i>	<i>Media</i>	
		Means-testing (.000)	30	21	46	65	49	40	50
		Universalism (.000)	76	78	67	52	60	67	59
		"It seems that citizens are strongly in favour of a universal national pension (70%). Support for a targetive scheme is low (30%)."							
Forma & Kangas (1999, p. 170-1, 181-2)	A cross-national survey conducted in Australia, Finland and Poland in 1994-95, which asked respondents whether government should provide (a) no old-age pensions at all, (b) means-tested pensions, and (c) universal pensions.	<i>Table 8.1</i> Attitudes on pension policy in Australia, Finland and Poland; the share of positive responses (%). (Values within parentheses are p-values)							
		<i>No government pensions at all</i>		<i>Means-tested government pensions</i>		<i>Universal govern-ment pensions</i>			
		Total							
		Australia		15.6		34.2		51.7	
		Finland		6.0		29.5		76.3	
		Poland		7.5		24.7		50.7	
		"The majority of the respondents in all countries regard selective pensions as bad policy. [...] In Finland, a substantial majority, and a slight majority in Australia and Poland are in favour of universal old-age support".							
		"Australia leads in the support for selectivism, while universal benefits are most popular in Finland. However, again it must be pointed out that universal basic pensions in all three countries are far more popular than selective benefits or the marginal self-help model".							

		"There seems to be some correspondence between the national welfare state models and popular opinion when it comes to the construction of basic pension security. Countries behave 'as they should': Australians are the most eager proponents of selective benefits, whereas the Finns lead in the support for universal benefits".		
Van Hootegem, Abts & Meuleman (2019)	A Belgian survey conducted in 2014, which asked respondents how government should organize health care, pensions and unemployment benefits.	Table 1. Question wordings and percentages of respondents opting for equality, equity and need in the three welfare domains		
		Question wording	Principle of distributive justice	Percentage of respondents
		<i>Q67- Health care</i>		
		"Minimal basic health care for people who are truly in need"	Need	8.1
		"Better health care for people who have earned and contributed more"	Equity	9.9
		"Equal and reasonable health care for everyone"	Equality	82.0
		<i>Q93 – Pensions</i>		
		"A minimal pension for the poor elderly, which only covers their basic needs"	Need	4.6
		"A higher pension for people who have earned and contributed more"	Equity	36.9
		"A reasonable pension for all, which is equal for everyone"	Equality	58.4
		<i>Q113 – Unemployment benefits</i>		
		"A minimal unemployment benefit for the unemployed who are in real need"	Need	18.8
		"A higher unemployment benefit for people who have earned and contributed more"	Equity	29.0
		"A reasonable benefit for all the unemployed, which is equal for everyone"	Equality	52.2
		Percentages are weighted for age, gender and education		

Gevers et al. (2000, p. 315)
*see also Mau (2003, p. 175)

A cross-national survey (i.e. *Eurobarometer 44.3*) conducted in 15 countries in 1996, which asked respondents how they think health care should be organized.

Table 3. Distribution measures for q121c, q121d and q122

COUNTRY		DM	WG	G	I	S	F	IRL	NL	P	GB	FIN	SW	A
q121c														
The government should provide everyone with only essential services such as care for serious diseases and encourage people to provide for themselves in other respects	% disagree completely	41.90	25.60	29.20	41.90	35.20	26.60	25.00	39.00	21.30	44.90	23.30	36.80	18.60
	Mean	3.71	3.50	3.60	3.44	3.82	3.44	3.40	3.54	3.48	3.98	3.28	3.98	3.18
	Standard deviation	1.41	1.26	1.30	1.54	1.20	1.35	1.30	1.46	1.20	1.21	1.38	1.08	1.27
	skewness	-0.70	-0.47	-0.67	-0.29	-0.84	-0.45	-0.32	-0.44	-0.44	-1.03	-0.22	-1.06	-0.10
q121d														
It is impossible for any government or public or private insurance scheme to pay for all new medical treatments and technologies	% disagree completely	9.70	13.20	28.80	26.90	21.50	23.30	10.40	16.10	12.90	16.80	5.10	8.40	10.50
	Mean	2.36	2.96	3.68	3.06	3.41	3.43	2.64	2.72	3.20	2.89	2.49	2.73	2.85
	Standard deviation	1.31	1.26	1.19	1.48	1.23	1.24	1.21	1.38	1.22	1.36	1.11	1.23	1.22
	Skewness	0.79	0.07	-0.68	0.07	-0.32	-0.33	0.53	0.45	-0.01	0.25	-0.33	0.27	0.16
q122														
The government has to ensure that health care is provided to all people residing legally here, irrespective of their income (%)	% choosing alternative 1	86.50	71.80	87.20	71.70	90.10	76.20	58.90	77.70	72.00	85.90	79.60	94.80	65.00
	Mean	2.86	2.67	2.83	2.68	2.88	2.70	2.55	2.75	2.66	2.84	2.79	2.94	2.59
	Standard deviation	0.38	0.57	0.47	0.53	0.40	0.58	0.58	0.5	0.59	0.41	0.43	0.27	0.61
	Skewness	2.52	1.52	2.85	1.44	3.39	1.79	0.84	1.84	1.53	2.60	1.70	4.87	1.18

Note: DM=Denmark; WG=West Germany; G=Greece; I=Italy; S=Spain; F=France; IRL=Ireland; NL=Netherlands; P=Portugal; GB=Great Britain; FIN=Finland; SW=Sweden; A=Austria.

"Very high levels of agreement with the third statement provide evidence of a widespread preference for universal health care policies in all countries. Within as well as across countries, responses are unanimous in this regard. Support for an all-encompassing health care system is especially high in countries with highly developed National Health Services, such as Denmark, Great Britain and Sweden. Equally high proportions are found in countries with less consolidated National Health Services, like Greece and Spain. Austria and Ireland show the lowest percentages of people opting for broad health care provisions, but still more than half of their populations favours universal over selective provisions".

KU Leuven Faculty of Social Sciences
Centre for Sociological Research
Social Policy & Social Work
Parkstraat 45 box 3601
3000 Leuven, Belgium

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